

Court Case Study: Yakima County District Court

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The Customer

The City of Yakima, Washington is in the heart of central Washington, an area well known for its agricultural bounty of apples, hops and wine grapes. Yakima is the county seat of Yakima County, with a population of a little over 248,000 residents.

The County District Court was looking for new ways to meet four goals while moving closer to a 100 percent paperless court: reduce costs, increase efficiency, increase employee satisfaction and provide better customer service. The Court selected ImageSoft's solution suite powered by OnBase® and TrueFiling.

The Yakima County District Court, a Court of Limited Jurisdiction, handles more than 25,000 cases each year. It operates from two locations, one in Yakima and one 40 miles away in Grandview. It hears cases involving traffic/non-traffic infractions, misdemeanor/gross misdemeanor criminal offenses, civil matters for damages and contract disputes not exceeding \$100,000 and small claim matters for recovery not exceeding \$5000, name changes and anti-harassment/stalking protection orders.

The Challenge

Prior to deploying ImageSoft's solutions, the County District Court was living “in a paper world,” according to the District Court Manager, Therese Murphy. Like many courts, it was generating virtually all records and files on paper and storing them in manual files on shelving units lining the office walls and stored in an old, empty jailhouse nearby. To answer questions or do any work affecting the file, staff had to find the file (unless it was in use by another clerk or misfiled, which is a common occurrence in any court office), and page through it to find the answer. Stacks of paper cluttered staff desks, waiting to be recorded and filed; files and papers lived in bins waiting to be sorted and placed on the shelf; precious resources were spent on forms, file folders and shelving units, not to mention staff labor to move these files from place to place.

Because the Court hosts two locations, staff had to move physical files the 40 miles between offices if staff in either office needed them. For judges to access the court record, staff had to move the physical files to courtrooms and chambers. Complicating matters, the Court was losing its storage space at the less than convenient jailhouse.

It's a pretty typical picture of courts across the country, ready to move toward paper on demand or paperless operations.

The Solution

The Court selected ImageSoft's TrueFiling solution which combines its eFiling capability along with OnBase by Hyland. TrueFiling provides the Court with a

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24/7 web-based eFiling tool that improves efficiency for the courts and filers by reducing paper handling. It streamlines the court’s workflow by enabling two-way communication between filing parties and the Court. To keep the eFiled documents electronic throughout court processes, OnBase provides an integrated court case document management solution and an ImageSoft designed automated workflow specifically configured for courts. The eFiled documents flow seamlessly into OnBase and its workflow for immediate access and review. As filings move through the review process, the status is automatically updated in TrueFiling, providing real-time status tracking for all documents. This self-service access for the parties reduces call volume into the Court for status updates and provides a very important public service.

Deployment of the solution began in July 2016. The high configurability of OnBase Workflow enabled ImageSoft to design a workflow that works the way the Court needs to function. The Court saw the same productivity increases that other trial courts and appellate courts have experienced: 15-30 percent in a single year. The Court also leveraged ImageSoft’s TrueSign™, an electronic signature and markup tool designed for judges. Documents such as orders are routed to the judges through the automated workflow where they can edit and sign documents on the bench, in their chambers or at home without touching a single sheet of paper.

ImageSoft’s comprehensive suite of technology solutions allows courts to securely store, manage and route records and files electronically. It results in improved efficiency and better transparency. Critical documents and content, including photos, videos and audio files, are stored in a secure environment that is quickly and easily accessed anytime, from anywhere.

The Results

Using ImageSoft’s TrueFiling and OnBase solutions, the Court is moving toward a paperless caseload system and meeting its goals.

Electronic case files are accessible to the entire court staff, from the courtroom to chambers, to staff offices and between the two offices in Yakima and Grandview. According to Ms. Murphy, it is very beneficial for the staff to be able to access all case files from either location.

Court clerks now answer questions for stakeholders in minutes rather than hours. Court staff can easily access files, regardless of the case stage. Efficiency and productivity are up dramatically, with civil paperwork processed and streamlined. Judges, in particular, are able to access documents from any location – paperwork is processed and filed faster and returned to the filer. In the past, it could take several days for paperwork to be processed and for the filer to receive a conformed copy – now filers receive their copy within 24 hours of the Court receiving the filing. Files pass seamlessly between Judges and court clerks with just a few clicks – instead of the old way of physically locating a file, printing a calendar and physically carrying it to the courtroom.

As just one example, the Court experienced a 93 percent time saving and \$12,749 cost savings in e-ticket infraction processing. What used to take 14 hours a week now takes only one hour per week.

The calendaring clerk and in-court clerks have experienced significant time savings as well. They no longer are creating new paper files and prepping paperwork for each case. Now this is accomplished electronically.

The Court has been able to reallocate labor resources thanks to the case document management system. Managing paper files took up the resources of 1½ full-time equivalent staff members before implementing the solution. Since the go-live date, a half-time position manages the remaining paper files, allowing the Court to move staff resources to work on other strategic projects.

One of the most obvious benefits of the solution is the expansion of office space afforded by the removal of a large shelving unit. Because the Court now accesses and stores files electronically, it was able to eliminate one shelving unit (156 feet long by 23 inches deep, with approximately 2000 files stored on both sides). The Court will remove a second, similarly sized shelving unit soon adding to the functional workspace in the office. In addition to removing the unit itself, associated storage and labor costs are now a thing of the past.

Ms. Murphy identified one of the strengths of the new system revolves around missing files. She stated, "...we no longer end up with missing files, or paperwork. Even if a document was scanned under the wrong case number, you are able to go in, retrieve that document and correct the mistake. Another strength is that we are able to see the history of a document – this has come in very handy for me." Ms. Murphy pointed to the importance of being able to answer questions about the file and do meaningful research on what was done, when it was done and by whom.

Another practical benefit is the cost savings in office supplies of multiple forms and file folders. Previously, the Court used dozens of multi-part forms; the majority of those forms are no longer needed.

To improve citizen access, the Court has added kiosks in two locations so the public can search court case files.

The Court still uses another software solution for older archived cases, some infractions and driving with license suspended 3rd degree or DWLS 3s, but it is less user friendly and the retrieval of incorrectly entered files is difficult and time consuming. Using the OnBase solution, the staff has found how easy it is to look up cases, retrieve them and make instant corrections.

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	Before OnBase/ TrueFiling	After OnBase/ TrueFiling
Office Tech Positions	1 ½ -time - \$64,819	¼-time - \$11,412
Office Specialist	1 full-time - \$58,417	½ time - \$27,843
Files/Forms/ Printing	\$26,477	\$16,796
Copier	\$2,945	\$805
OnBase/TrueFiling		\$55,00
Maintenance		
TOTAL	\$152,658	\$111,856

In Their Own Words

The ease of integration of OnBase is a huge benefit to the Court, according to Ms. Murphy. In fact, one of the most talked about and well-liked features was the ability of one of the developers to integrate Box.com (a file sharing platform). Ms. Murphy indicated: “We use Box.com to send paperwork to outside agencies. The ease of being able to send paper seamlessly from within OnBase is invaluable to a court clerk.”

Another staff member gave a telling response as to how easy it is to move files around: “I didn’t particularly expect how much time it would save me in a work day.” And this: “The “file” and all documents are right there at your fingertips. TrueFiling is amazing!..we are able to view the workflow to see where documents are rather than having to rifle through hundreds of documents to find the location and status.”

Another staff person reported: “One thing that I am really impressed with is how OnBase has simplified the way that we import infractions and warrants. At first it was a bit of an uphill battle, but we are now starting to see the benefits of the OnBase cases and how much faster and simpler it has made this process.”

One of the Court’s staff members commented about the solution: “As much as I can use OnBase, I will.” Ms. Murphy agreed that this pretty much sums up the whole Court’s experience.

Several staff members agree that they enjoyed working with the ImageSoft deployment team members, saying “He has been a tremendous help to us. Also, more recently we have had the pleasure of working with customer care (who) has been invaluable to us. Thanks for all your assistance.”

The Next Steps

The Court hopes to expand its use of OnBase and TrueFiling to the Civil Department. They would like to add all of the historical civil files into OnBase to use TrueFiling and experience the same benefits as the new cases using both solutions.

They are hoping to set up a web portal for customers to access and pay for court records electronically to streamline the process. In addition, the Court is looking at integration with the software solution used by the Prosecutor’s Office and the Department of Assigned Counsel.

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Yakima County District Court

The Challenges

- A manually prepared, paper-only process, resulting in misfiled documents, waiting on someone else who has the file, and similar paper-related issues.
- A growing need for physical storage, while the Court was simultaneously losing storage space
- Stacks of paper to be recorded, filed, sorted and placed on a shelf.
- Storage and labor costs to maintain and move paper files.
- Problems of moving files between two offices 40 miles apart.
- Physical movement of files inside the courthouse.
- Time spent providing status updates to parties on filings.

The Results

- Moving closer to a 100 percent paperless operation.
- Accessibility across the entire Court, anytime, anywhere, and at the same time.
- Accessibility to files from two court locations.
- More efficient and faster response rate to questions from stakeholders.
- Increased productivity and efficiency.
- Alleviating clerks of the need to create or prepare paper files.
- Reduced time spent on filing status updates.
- Reassignment of staff resources to more strategic projects.
- Expansion of office space following elimination of shelving unit.
- Cost savings in office supplies, copier charges, etc.